

Beyond Tradition: Gen Z's Approach to Big Law



2024 Survey of Gen Z Associates Working In Big Law

Beyond Tradition: Gen-Z's Approach to Big Law

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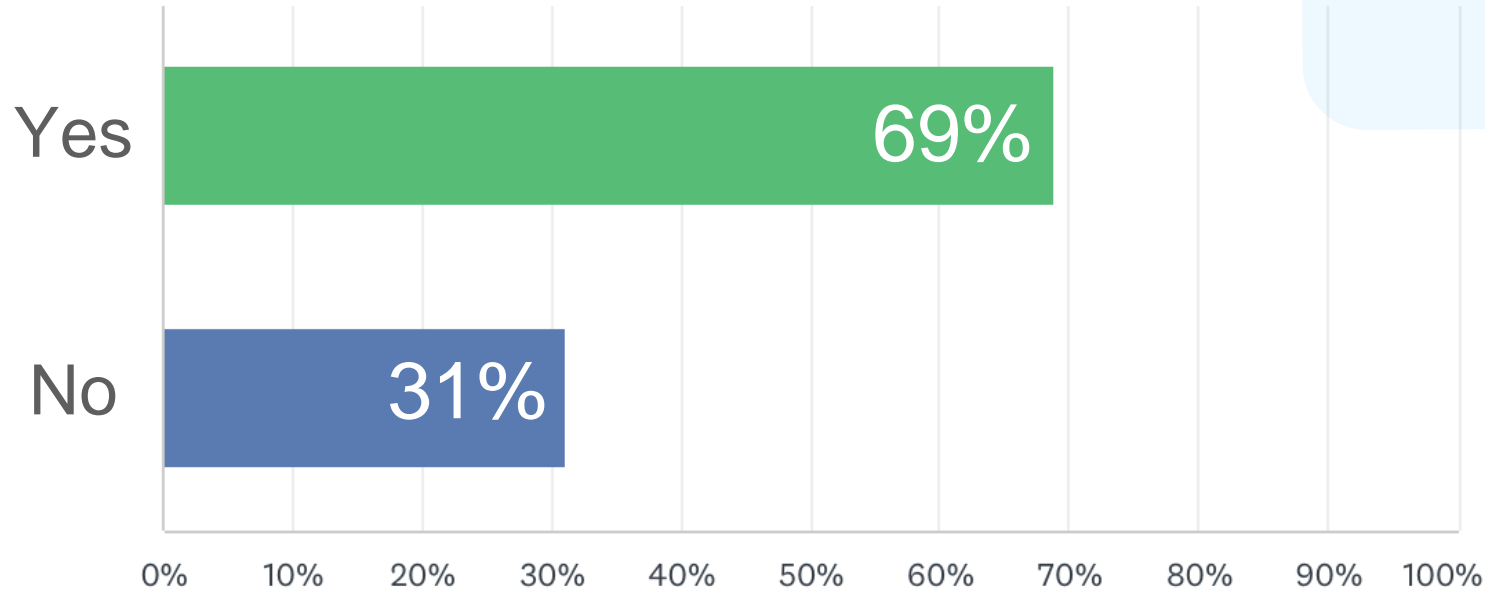
About the Respondents

546 completed the survey

- All respondents were in the USA
- Most were in litigation, followed by financial services and M&A
- 42% had been at their firm for less than a year, 21% 1 year, 21% 2 years
- 56% of respondents were female
- 55% were White, 9% African American, 11% Asian, 8% Hispanic, 4% Middle Eastern/North African
- 92% work for an Am Law Top 200 firm



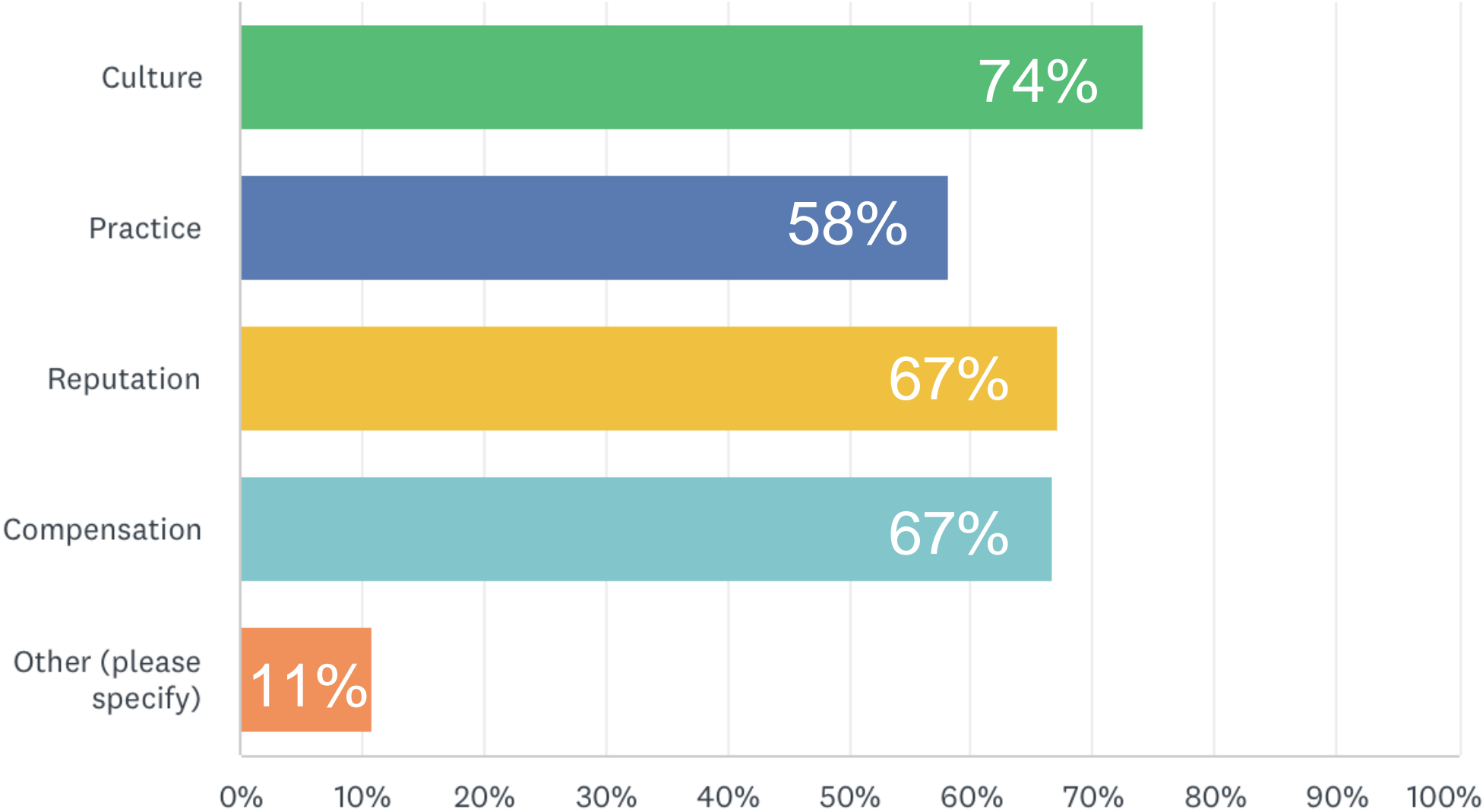
Has your experience working at your current firm matched the expectations you had in law school?



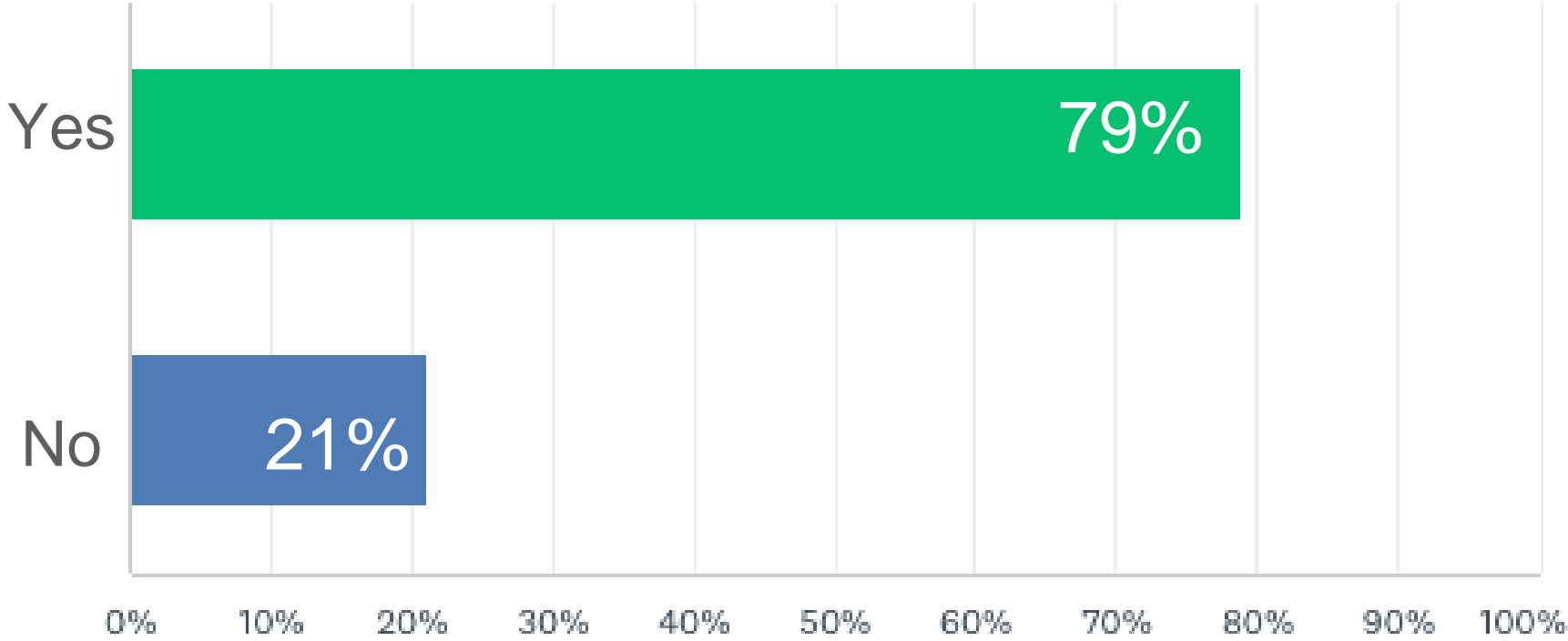
64% of women said Yes
76% of men said Yes

What made you choose your current firm? Choose all that apply.

Answered: 414 Skipped: 132

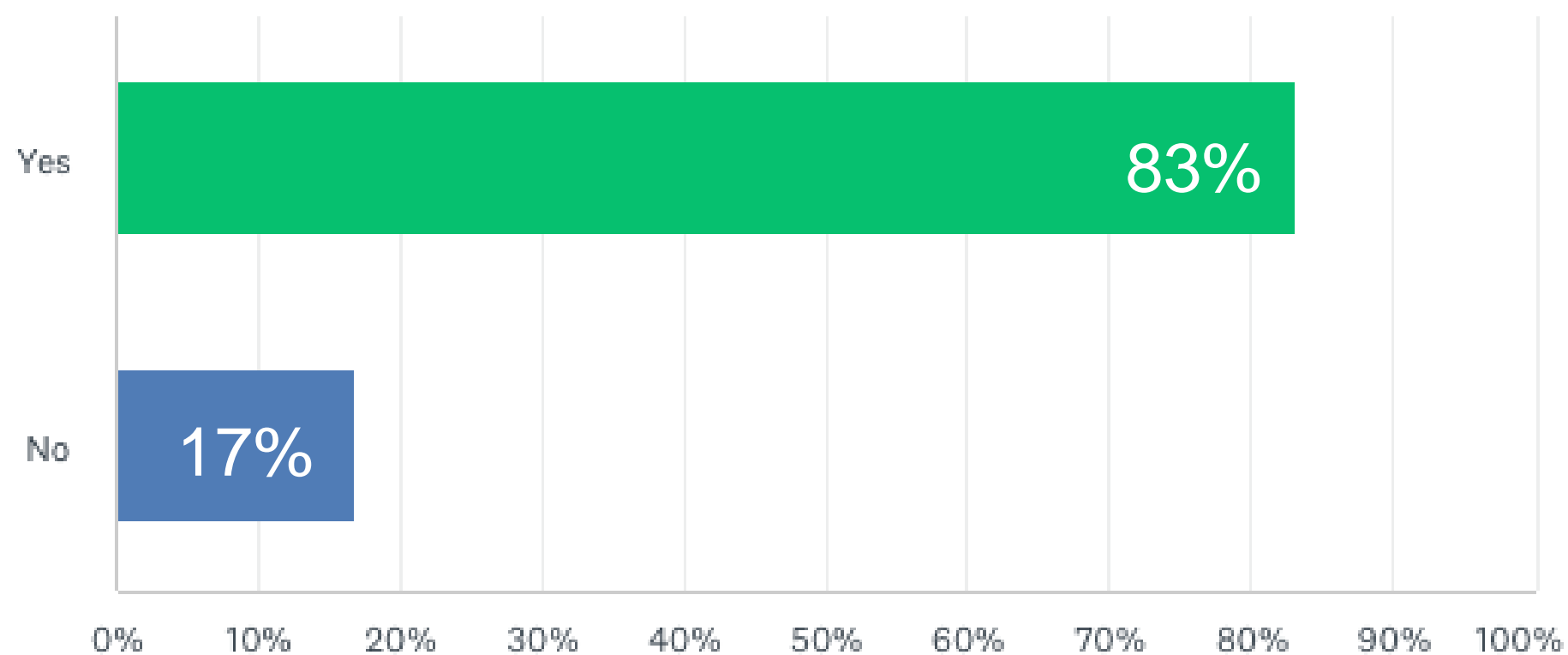


Are you satisfied with the work you've been assigned?



Would you make the same choice again?

Answered: 408 Skipped: 138



If Not Why?

This firm has a very poor **culture** with low associate morale. Many have been laid off and/or departing for other reasons.

The firm does not protect its associates

Practice ended up not being what I expected

Does not have the practice group I am the most interested in.

I am working at _____ which is regularly laying people off in mass, including juniors

The **culture** of my practice group does not match the general culture of the firm.

Culture drastically changed

Culture, reputation and compensation has plummeted since I was originally recruited

I wish I asked more questions about what the training structure would look like because there actually isn't one and I'm struggling and trusted everyday trying to learn how to be effective in what I do.

I didn't fully understand how demanding and all-consuming the job was.

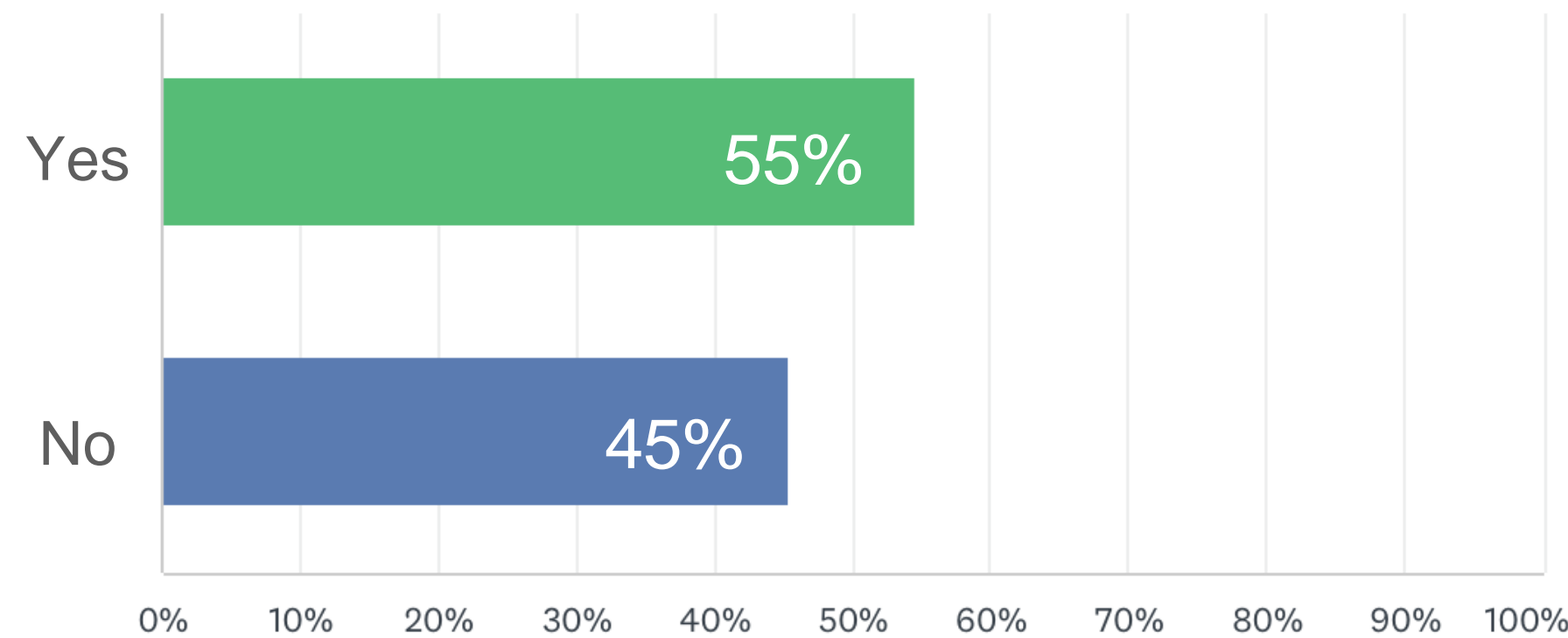
The **culture** at my firm is very negative. This firm is very toxic in a variety of ways

Firm **culture** is not as promised; partners are often unreachable and not responsive even when urgent work needs to be completed; partners are not good at managing teams or developing associates

My firm has been nothing like I thought it was and I feel undervalued and under-prepared



Do you feel your legal education prepared you well for your role at your current firm?



I am a transactional attorney and **law school focused on litigation and litigation skills**

You learn to study for the bar, not the law

No prior preparation on certain areas relevant to my work (IP law) and no prior preparation on how to understand and meet partner's expectations

Not enough actual practice of skills, too much high level overview

Legal education is academic, whereas **legal work is very practical and vocational.** I spend approximately **NONE** of my time reading cases and analyzing the law

There are many skills that you do not learn during your education

Did not learn the practical skills I needed to be an attorney, such as good email management, Adobe, Word Excel, etc.

Law school doesn't teach you how to be a lawyer and it certainly doesn't teach you how to be a transactional lawyer

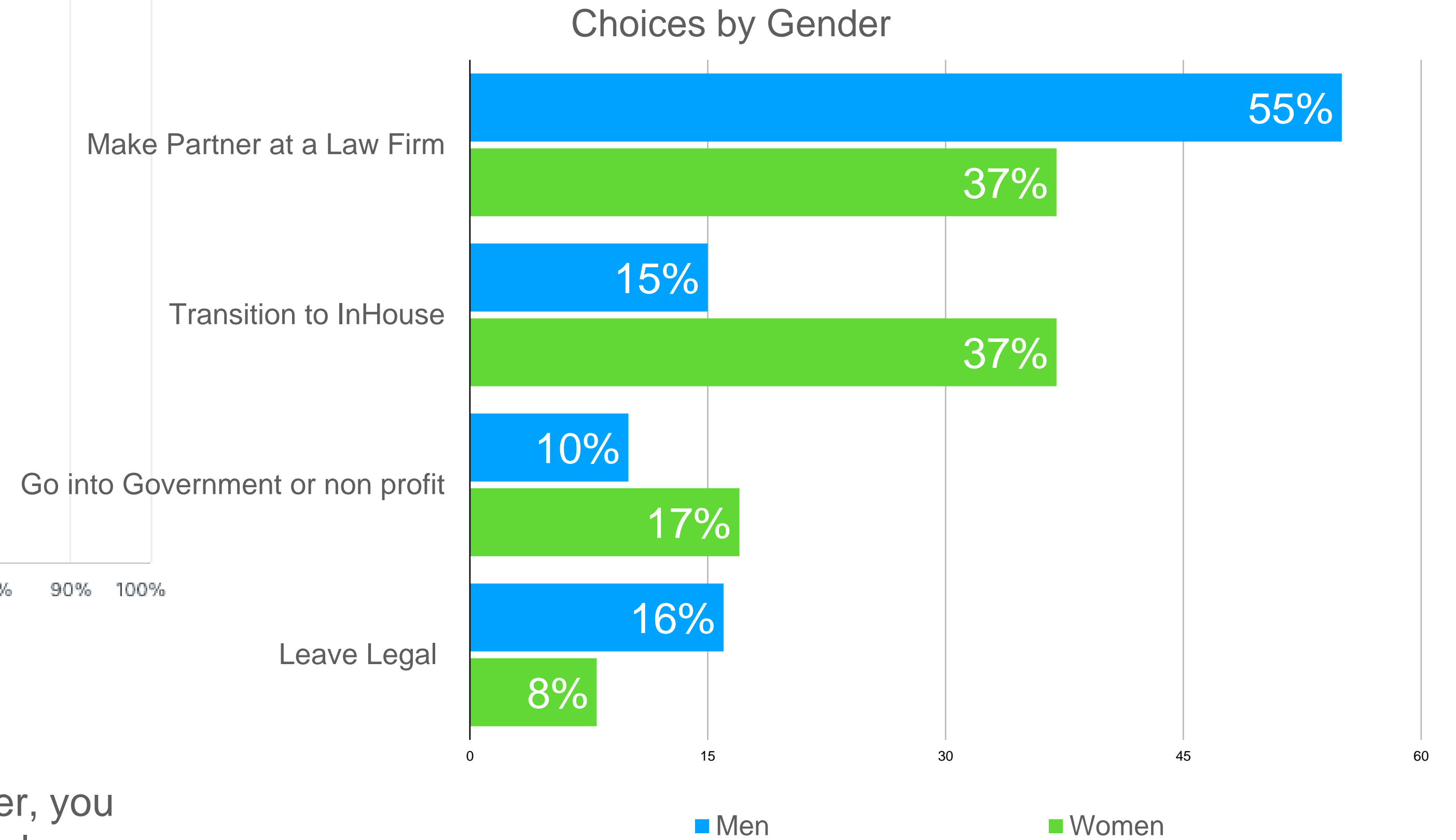
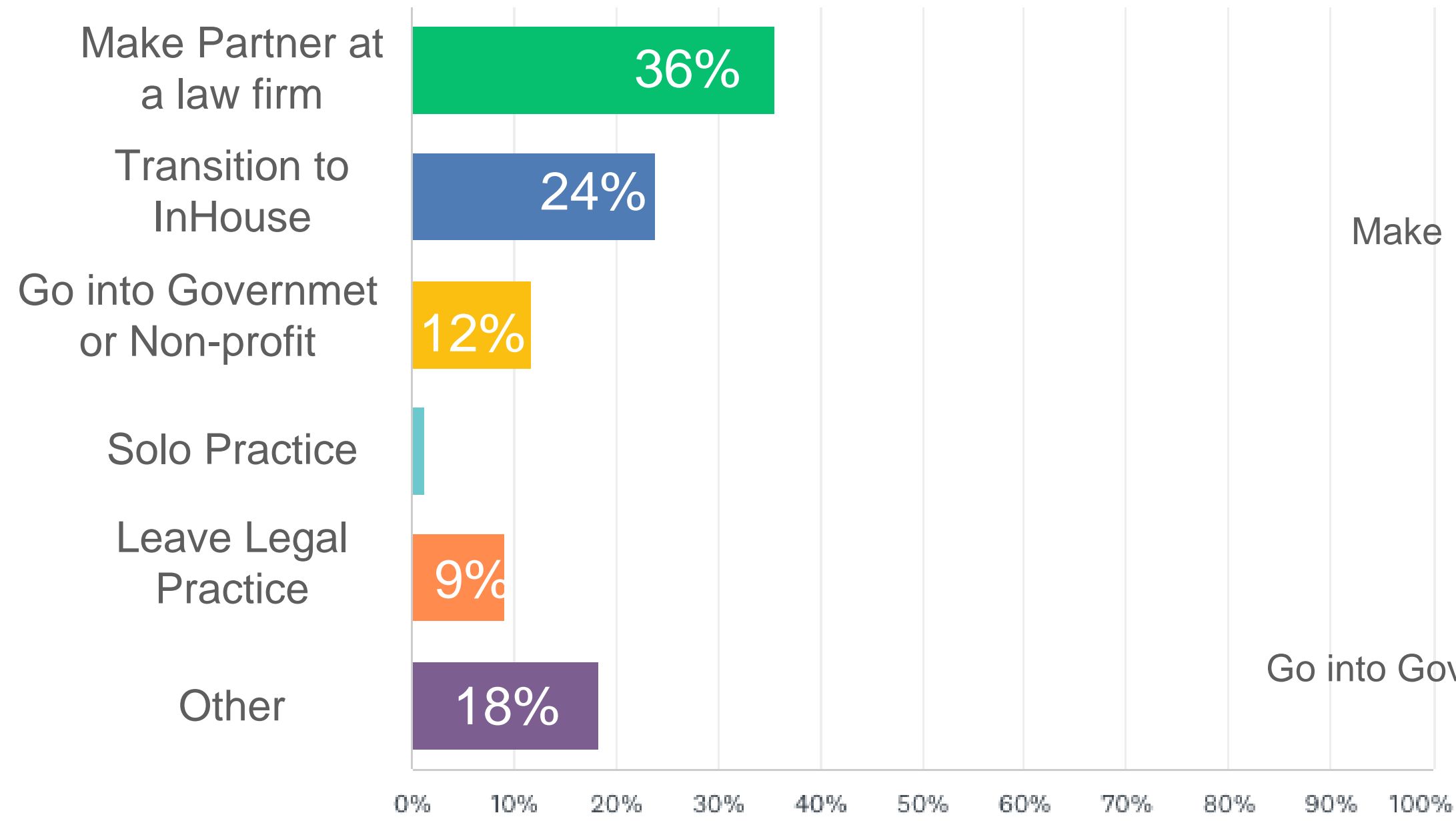
Legal education is so woefully not attached to the realities of Biglaw

Most of the things I learned in law school have nothing to do with my current practice



Reading appellate decisions is not especially applicable to the life of a junior corporate associate

What is your ultimate career goal?

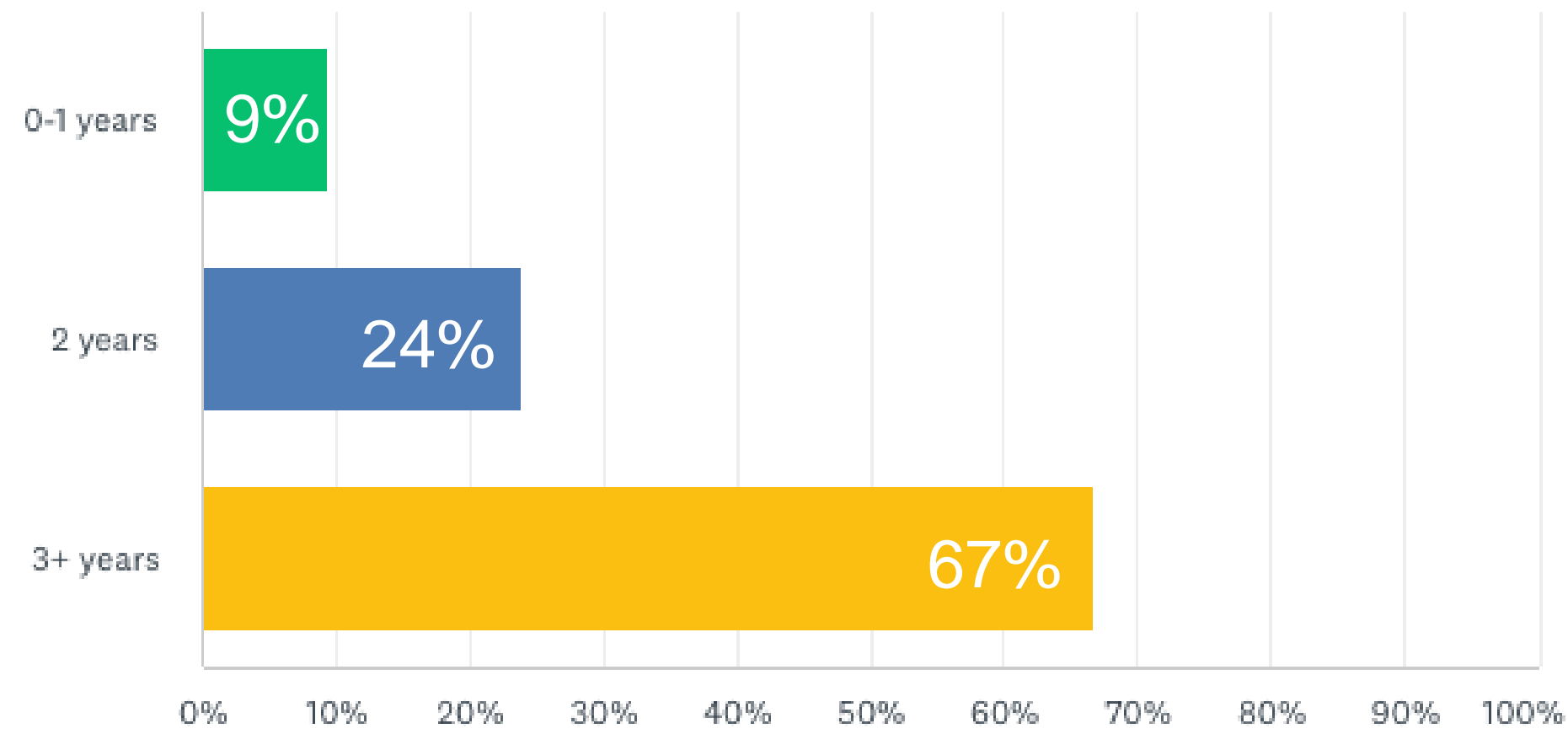


When broken down by Gender, you see a wide disparity in goals

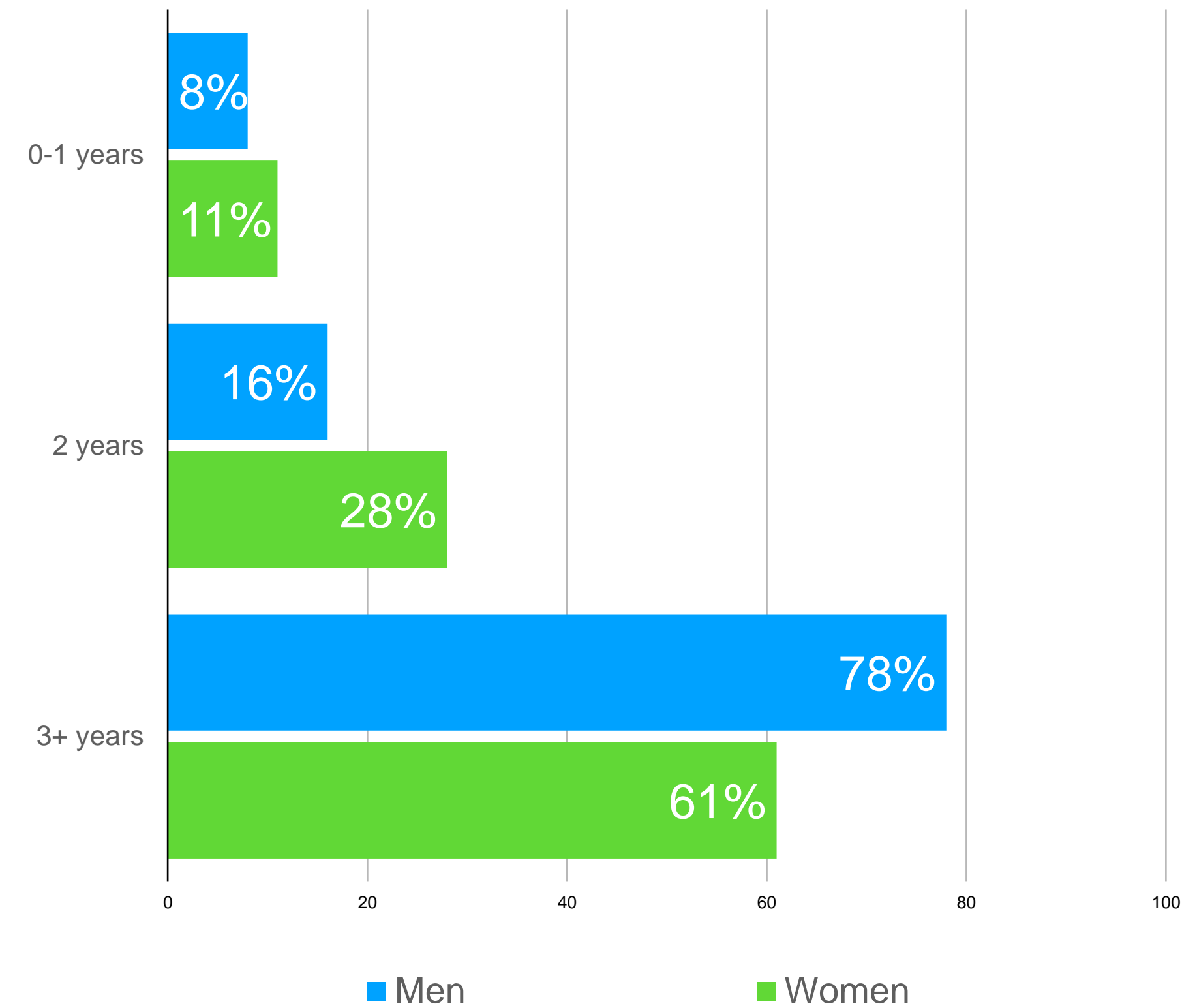


How long do you expect to stay at your current firm?

Answered: 407 Skipped: 139

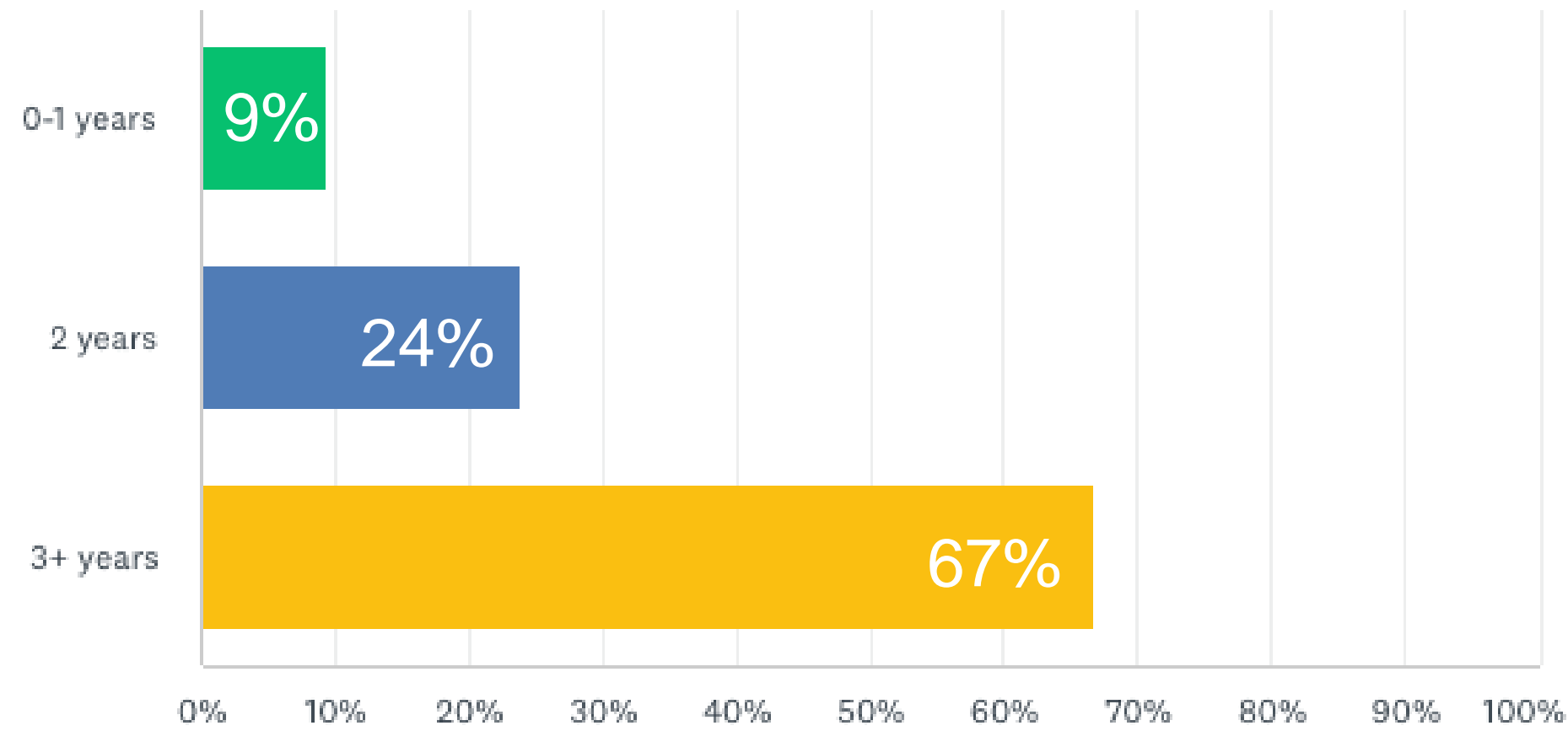


Choices by Gender

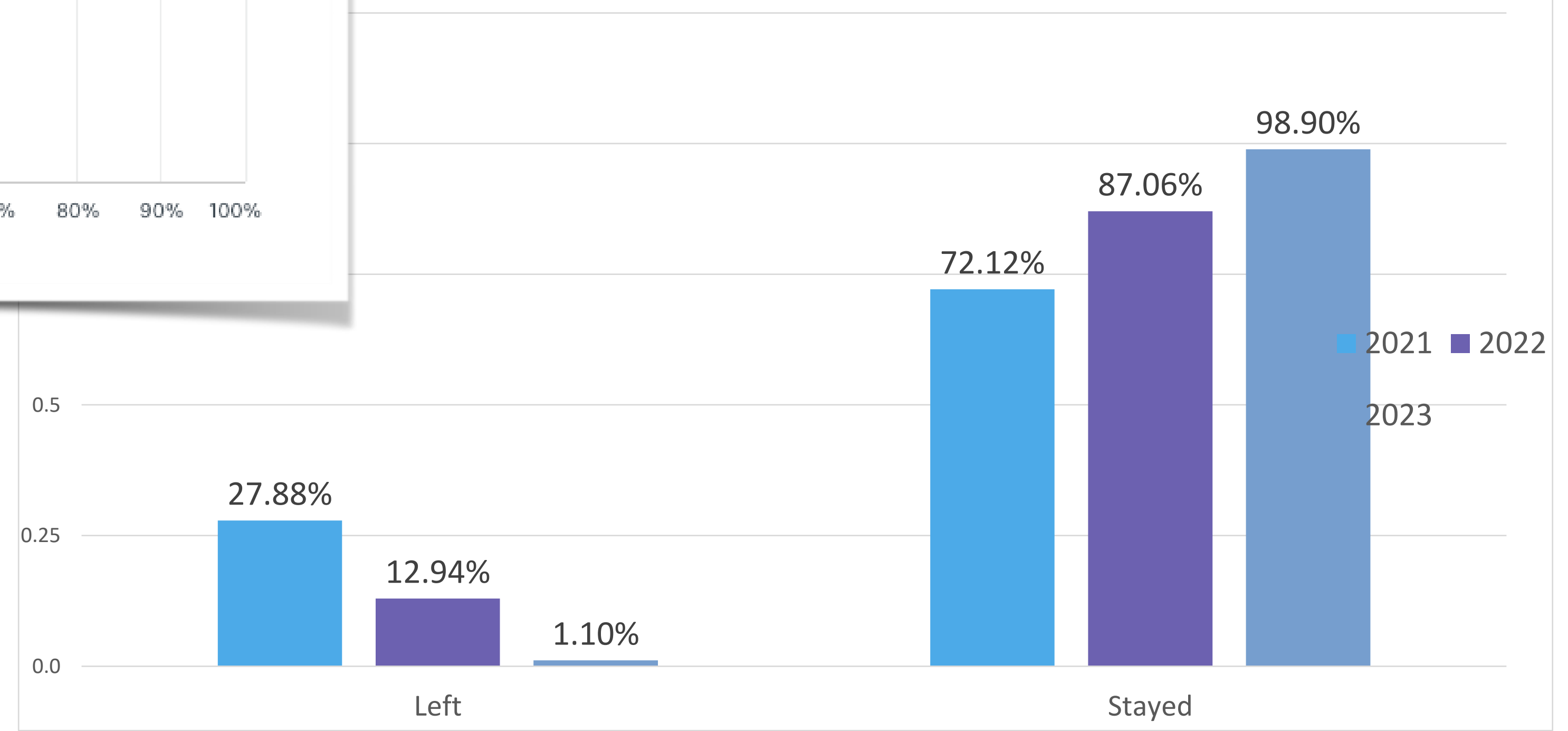


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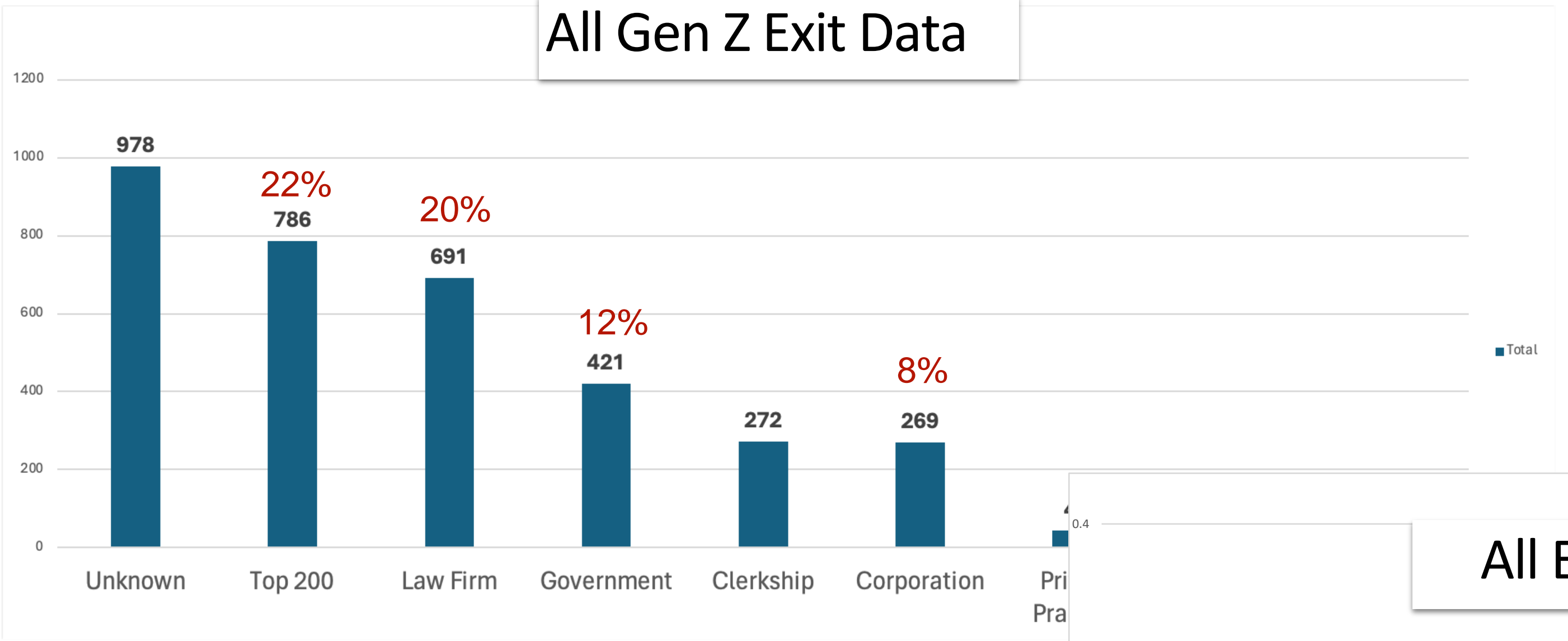
Retention Success by JD Year and Percentage



The JD years of 2022 and 2023 have not had the same opportunity to leave but 87% for 2022 is telling.

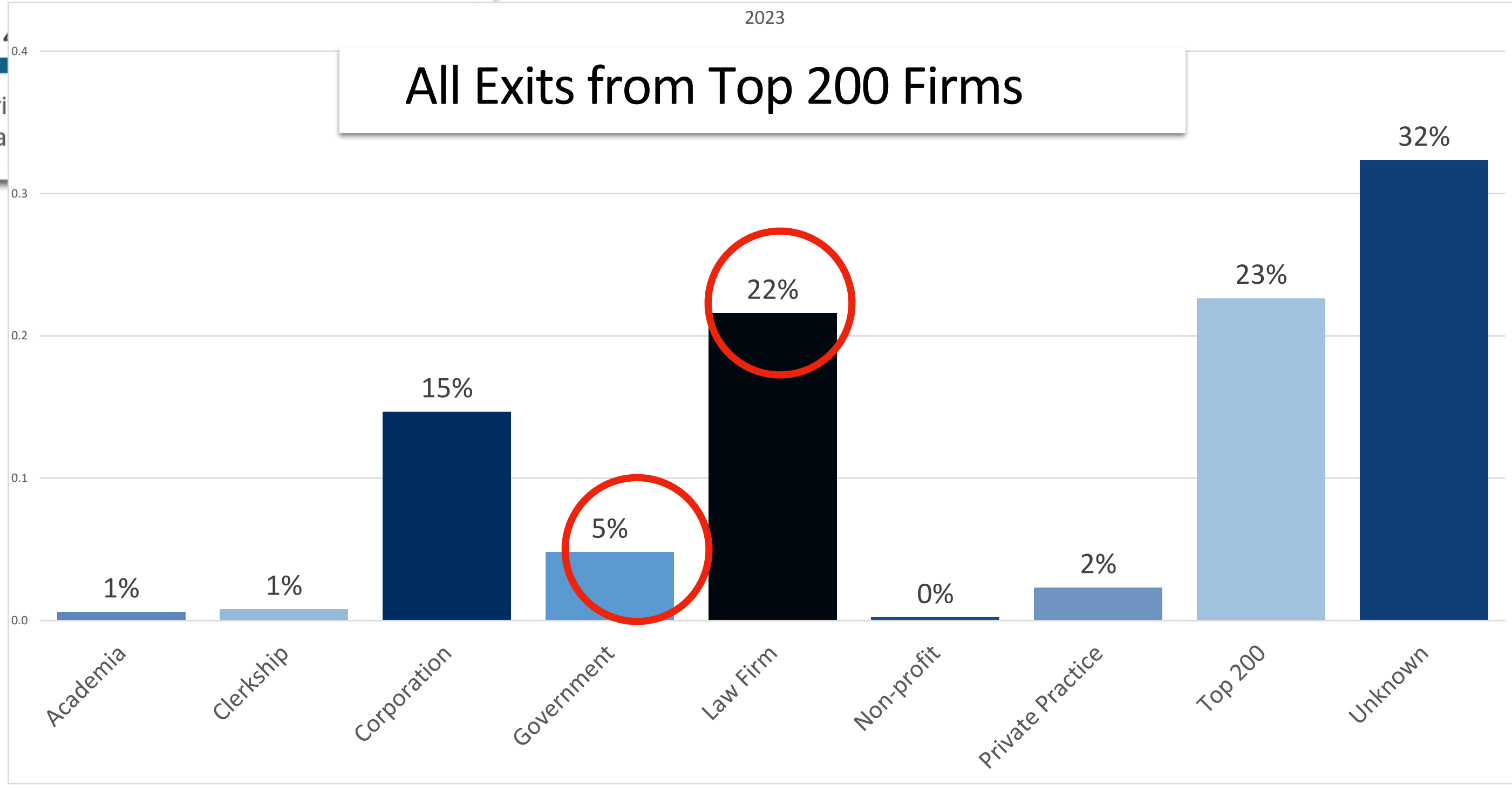


All Gen Z Exit Data



ROI is based on a 3 year metric for associates. We see here that nearly 28% of those with a JD year of 2021 have already exited their original firm. A large number of exits went back into a top 200 firm or law firm. The 'unknown' bar means that we currently have no data on their whereabouts.

All Exits from Top 200 Firms

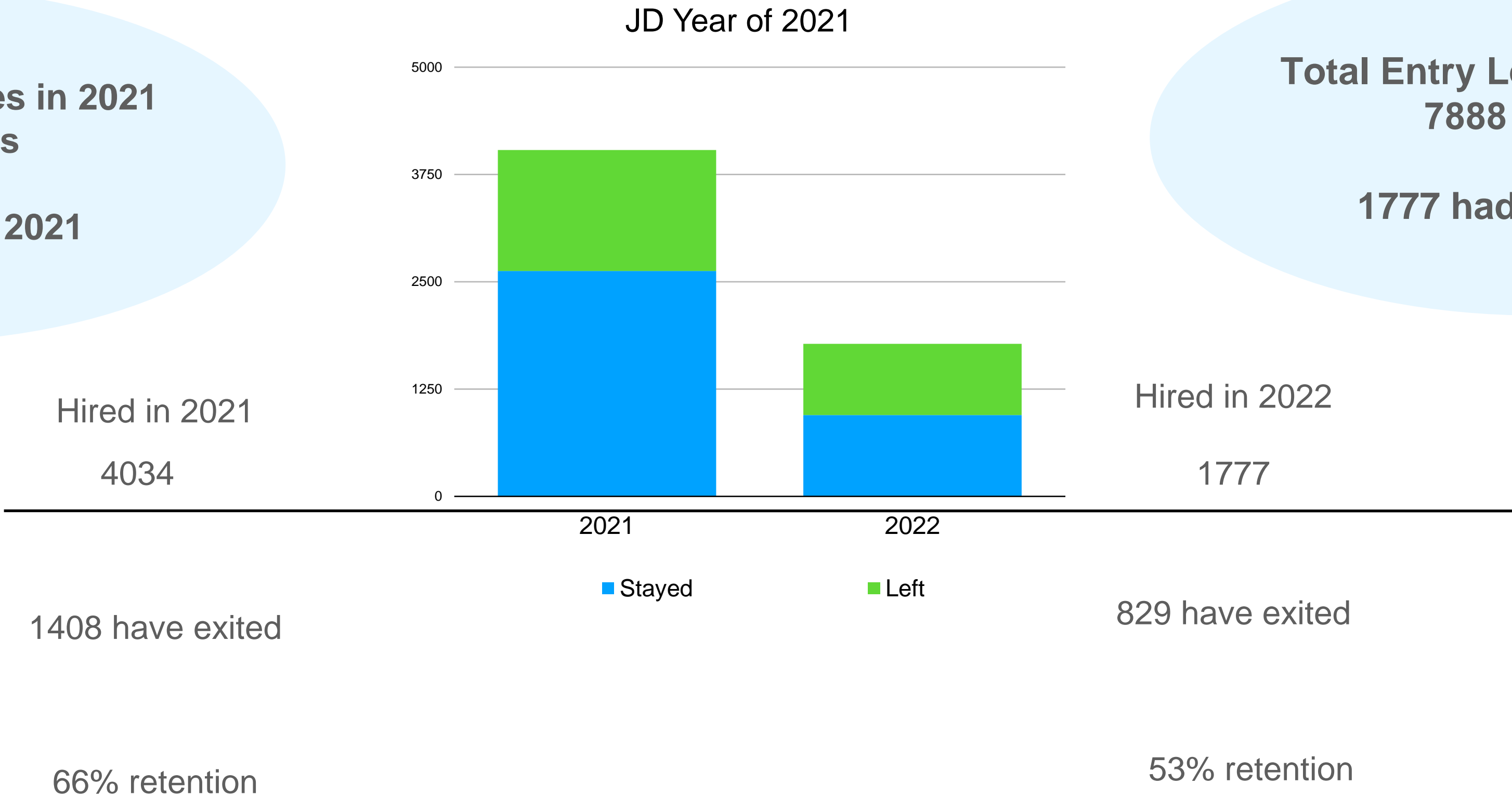


Gen Z has a different exit pattern than the general Top 200 population.



JD year of 2021 of Am Law 200

Total Entry Level Hires in 2021
9036 ALL JD's
4034 had a JD of 2021



Total Entry Level Hires in 2022
7888 ALL JD's
1777 had a JD of 2021

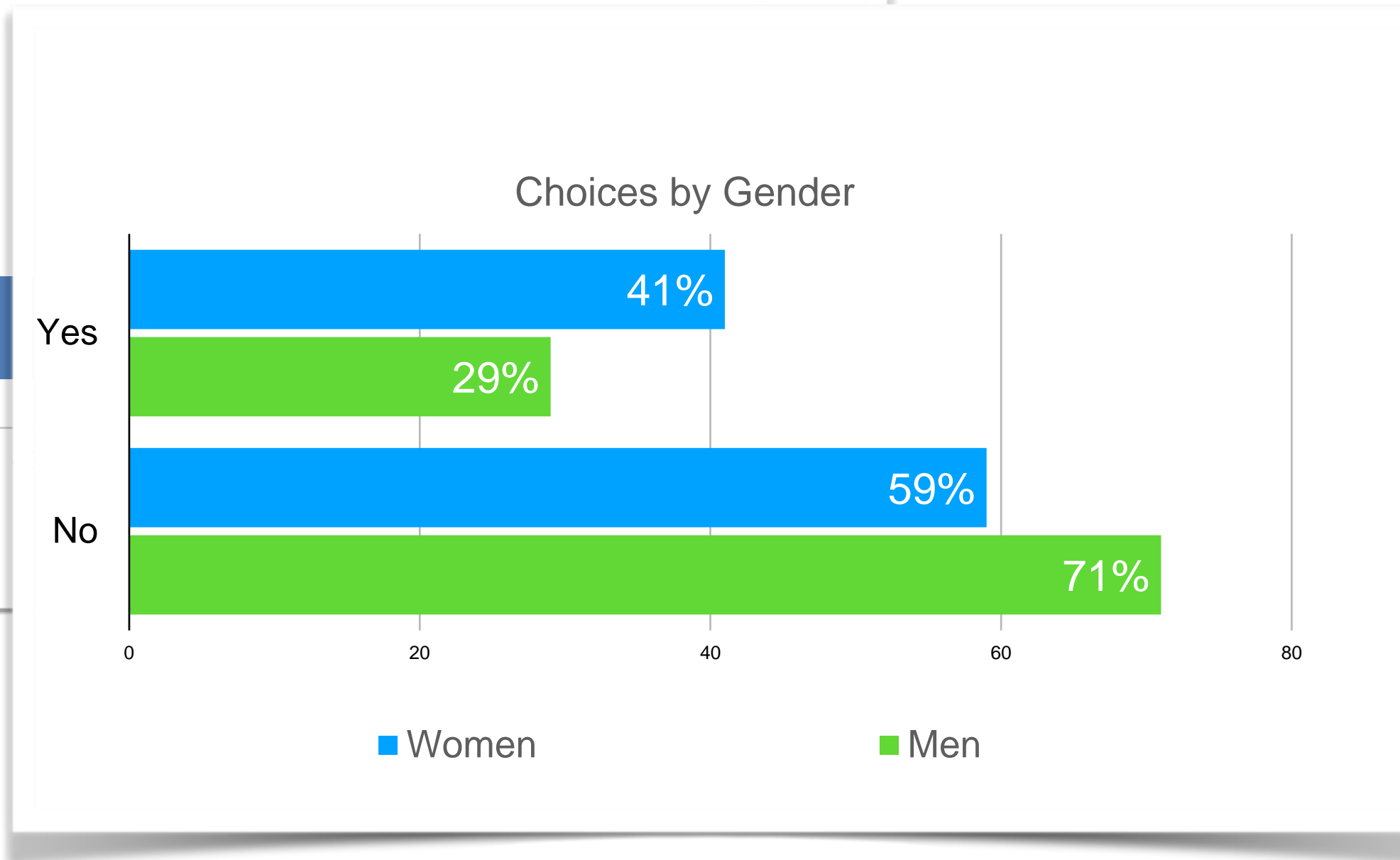
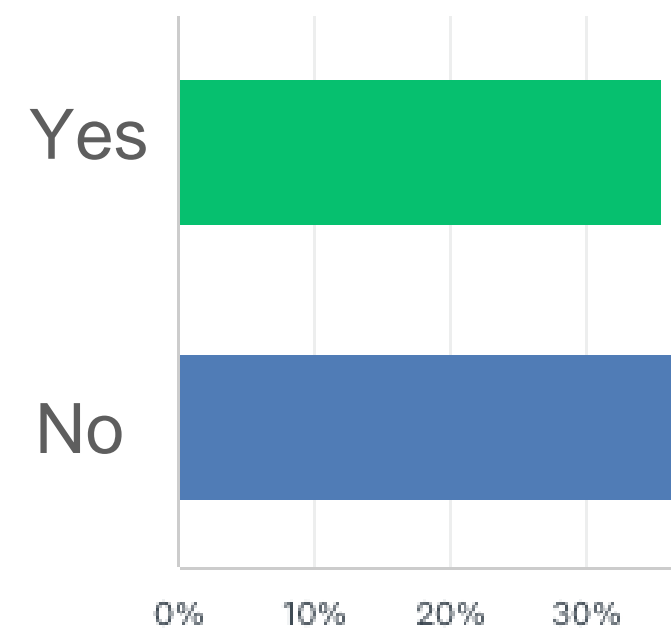
Hired in 2021
4034
1408 have exited
66% retention

Hired in 2022
1777
829 have exited
53% retention



Have your career goals changed since you started at your current firm?

Answered: 402 Skipped: 144



I was open to being partner when I started, but soon realized how unhappy they are

When I started I thought I would enjoy law firm practice. After two years I want to leave the law entirely.

I no longer want to be a partner after learning partners have no work-life balance

When I started out, I thought that I could have a long legal career at a firm. However, as I saw the sacrifices and lifestyle and type of people that pursue the partnership track, I decided that it wasn't a good fit for me and I would rather have greater flexibility and work life balance.

I just assumed I would always work toward partner. I am now seeing that the reward for partner seems to be a lot more work

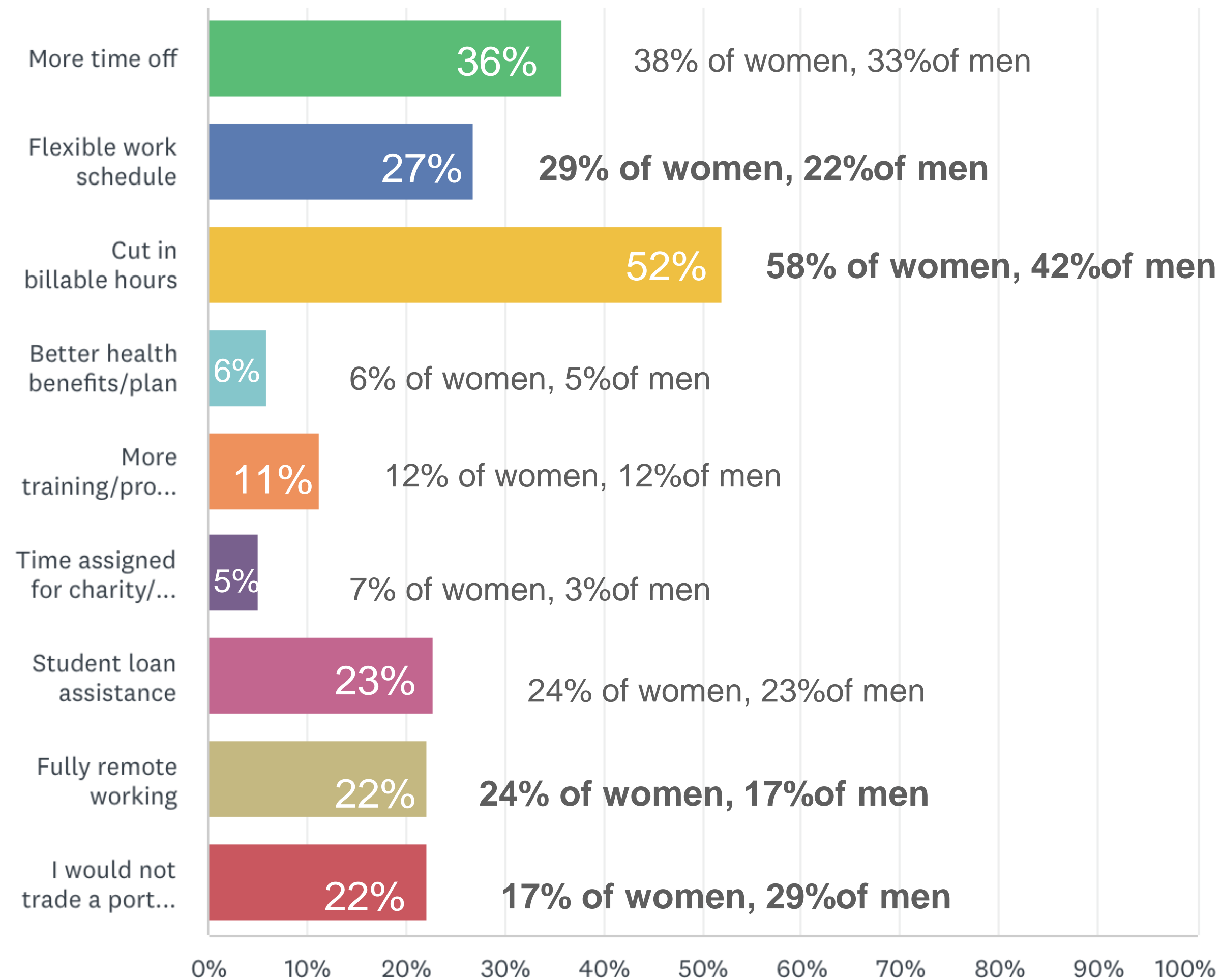
I no longer want to pursue a legal career as the law firms are not places that encourage leadership or encourage thinking - they are just machines

I want to be a partner - at a different law firm

I have no interest in making partner at a large firm anymore. I value excellence over the billable hour/profit and being a partner is all about the numbers. With all their responsibility, partners don't even get manage or leadership training from what I've experienced.



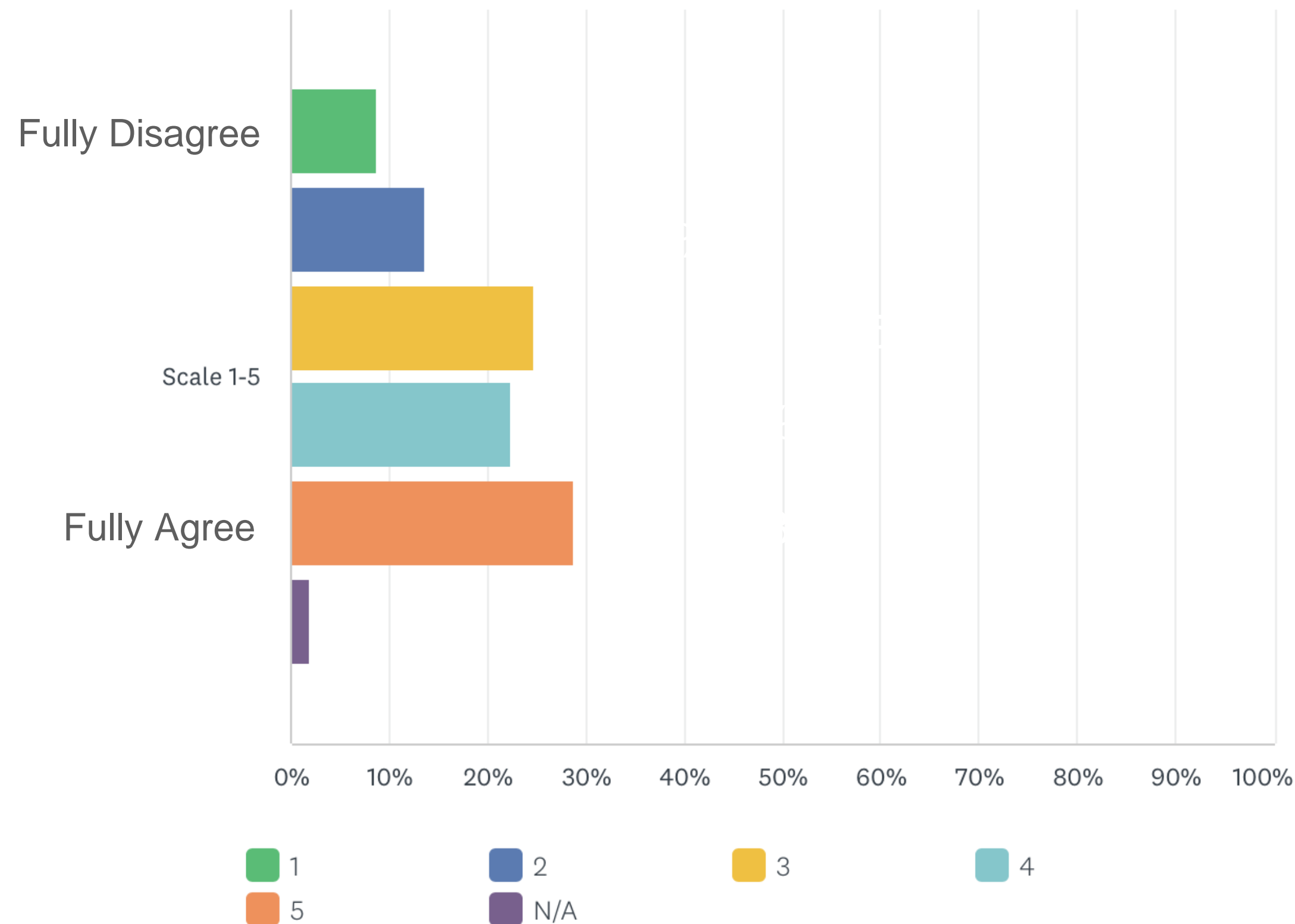
Which of the following, if any, would you trade a portion of your compensation for? Pick up to 3.



84% Said there for a formal mentorship program
65% said it was a random assignment, 22% were picked by a partner
Whether it has a positive impact was mixed.

On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being "Fully Agree" and 1 being "Fully Disagree," the formal mentorship program at my firm has had a positive impact on my development.

Answered: 323 Skipped: 223



Random Assignment of Mentor
43% agreed, 28% disagreed

Selected for mentorship by a partner
70% agreed, 9% disagreed

I selected a partner to mentor me
63% agreed 15% disagreed

Participation in an ERG or diversity initiative
43% agreed, 21% disagreed

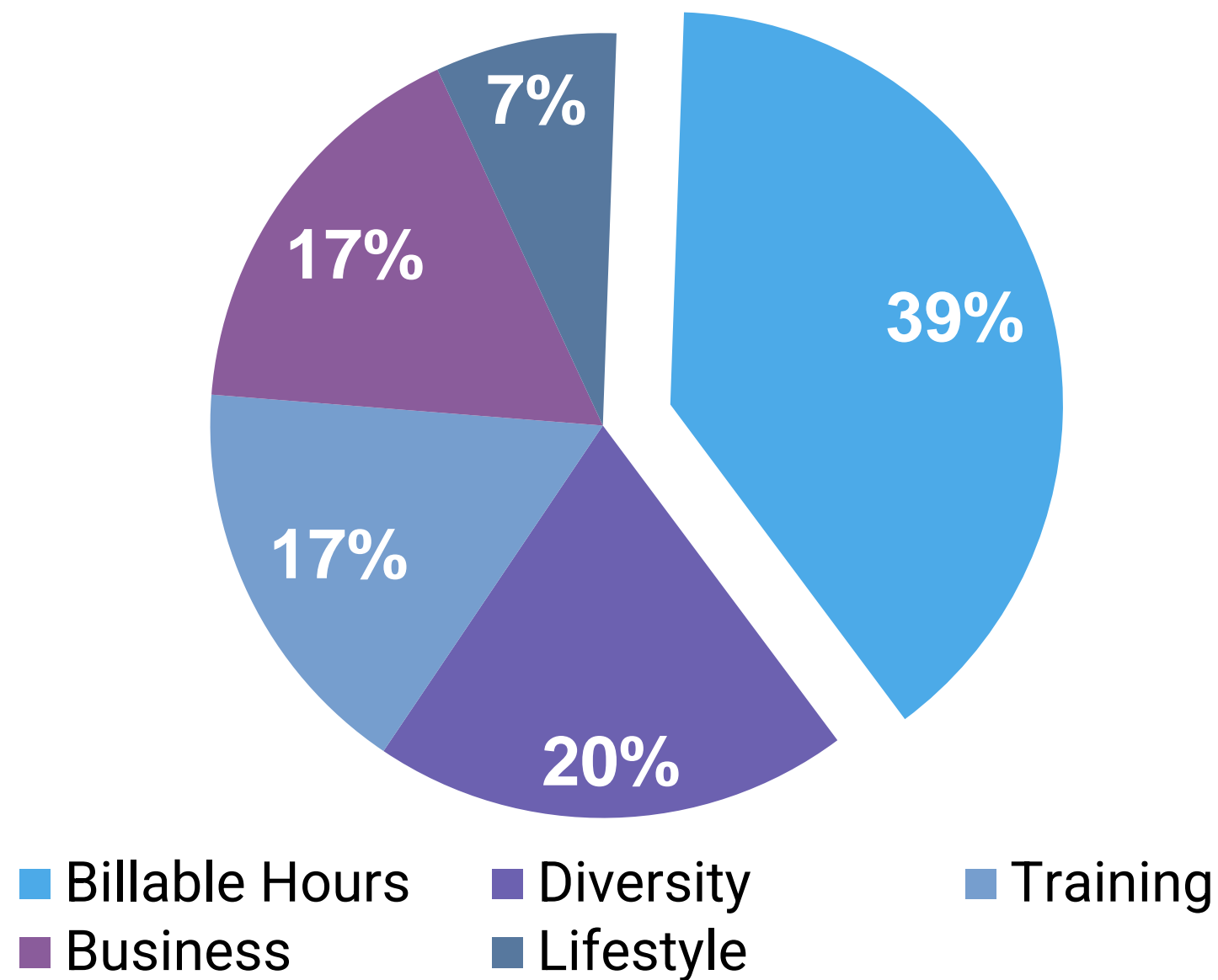


What change(s) could your firm make that would be the most meaningful to you?



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Improvement Suggestion Topics



Lower billable hours Less billable hours.
Billable vacation hours or lower billable hours requirements
Reduce the billable hour workload with a weekly target rather than annual.
Reduce billable hours Cut billable hours

Billable equivalent time for meaningful vacations (5+ days off)

Lower billable hour model - attorneys are human beings, not billable machines.

Billable hours for time dedicated to diversity initiatives; more diversity in executive committees; hiring a DEI expert

Putting more recognition on nonbillable efforts

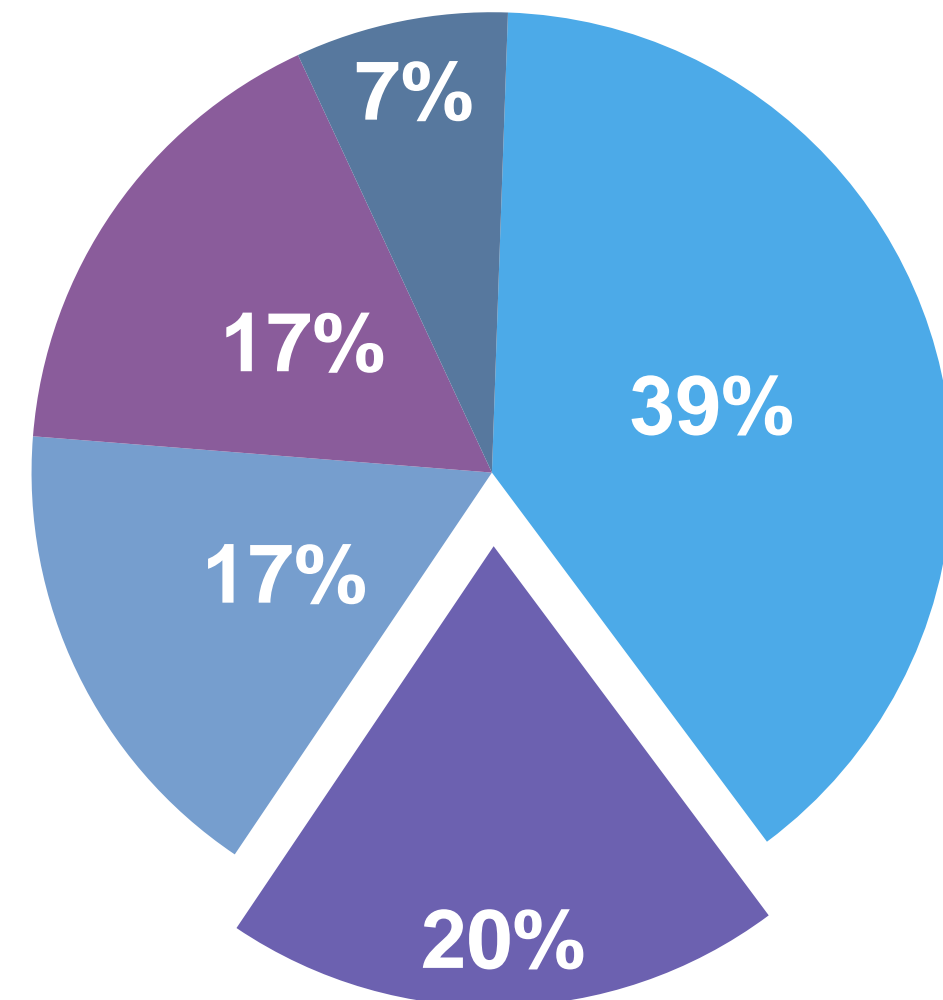
The firm could be more upfront about its expectations and be more humane when it comes to billable hours, availability, and respecting vacations.

Less compensation in exchange for a lower billable hours target, more realistic work-life balance, a genuine commitment to diversity that extends all the way to the partners, a genuine commitment to improving the mental health of attorneys



What change(s) could your firm make that would be the most meaningful to you?

Improvement Suggestion Topics



■ Billable Hours ■ Diversity ■ Training
■ Business ■ Lifestyle

Hire **more diverse** attorneys **more diversity** **More diversity** (class wise)

More diversity in terms of partners and associates (along sex, gender, racial/ethnic lines)

More diverse representation at events and top brass Gradually increase proportion of **diverse partners**; ensure remote working options are maintained or enhanced

More assertive and unambiguous stances on matters relating to diversity and inclusion instead of just using buzzwords to vaguely convey support for D&I

Emphasis on helping attorneys from minority backgrounds get work/involving them in more aspects of the firm and providing billable credit for those initiatives

More diversity or people my age in my practice group

More diversity in leadership, particularly as it expands there are opportunities to bring in female partners and POC partners.

Meaningful emphasis on diversity, inclusion, and a positive working culture, which for me, necessarily includes a reduced emphasis on billable hours and increased flexibility for remote work.

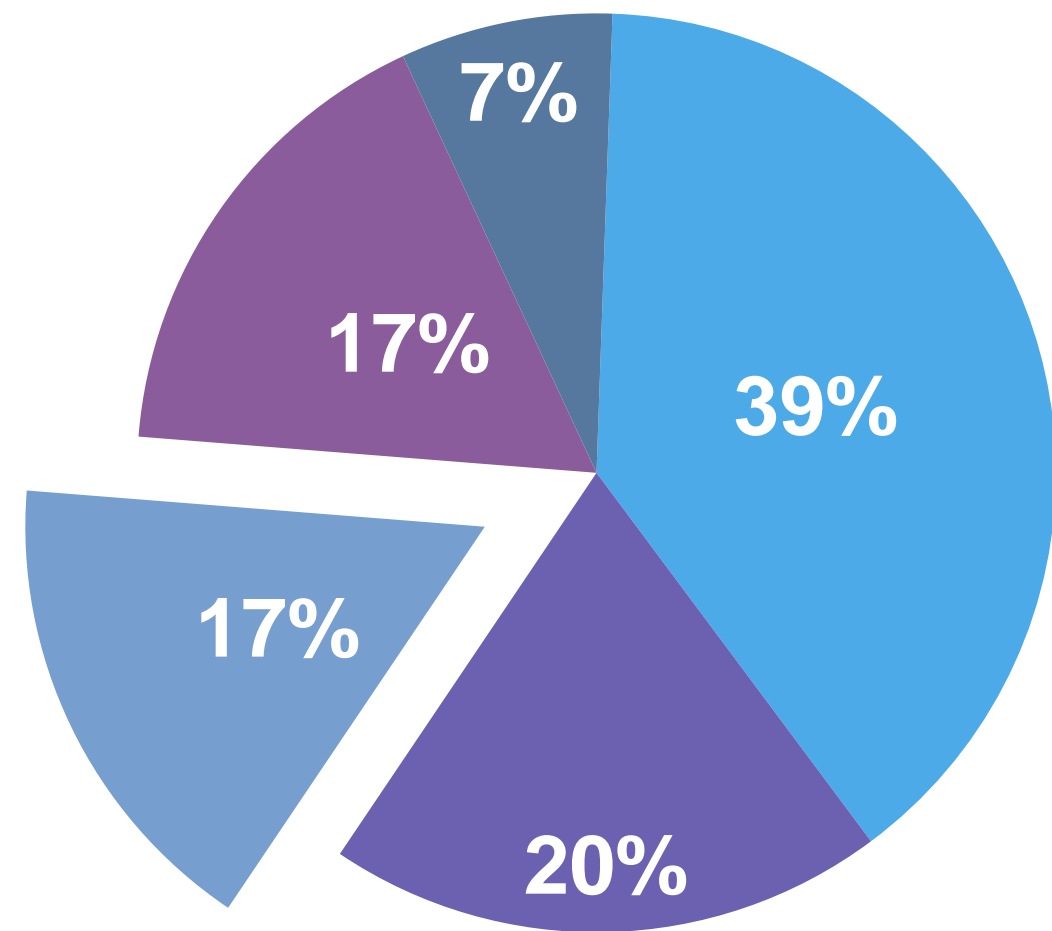
Meaningful efforts to reduce sexism and racism at work, and being more tolerant of junior associates' learning progression

More diversity efforts and more billable credit for diversity initiatives, pro bono, and community impact.



What change(s) could your firm make that would be the most meaningful to you?

Improvement Suggestion Topics



More robust program to bring first years up to speed

Ensuring that they provide meaningful feedback to Associates. Providing opportunities for Associates to network with others in different practice groups.

Greater **training**/learning period and creation of a rotational practice based program

Billable credit for **mentorship** - I hesitate to ask my mentor for too much of her time because I don't want to take away from her billable matters.

Retaining awesome partners. Several of my favorites left over the past year.

Way **more associate integration and cross training.** Way more coordination and communication amongst partners and/or practice areas to ensure associate success.

structured training with clear goals and defined progress metrics, especially for newer attorneys. pro bono work. basic organization of files. using the actual filing system that's meant to optimize our outputs.

Better annual review and feedback processes

match market pay and incentivize mid-level and senior associates to stay so that juniors can actually form meaningful relationships with them, be trained by them, and build **mentorship** relationships with them

office hours with partners to ask them anything once a week

more **mentorship** and training while on the job

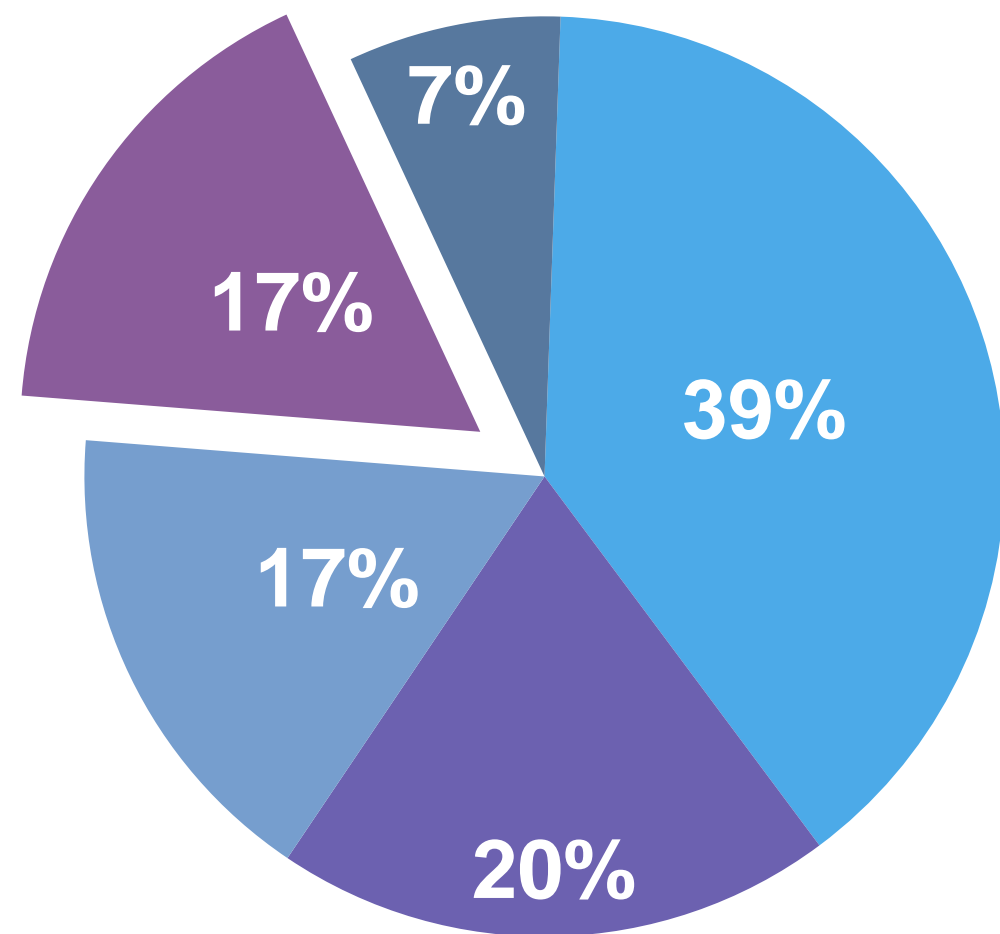
More thought needs to be put into **formal mentorship** i.e. working styles etc.

more mentorship, better help with stress levels and burnout. More of a push for in-person **mentorship** and culture. I'm in the office 3 days a week and I rarely if ever see partners for lunch, happy hours, or any in-person culture initiatives.



What change(s) could your firm make that would be the most meaningful to you?

Improvement Suggestion Topics



Switching to a set amount of annual PTO (currently have unlimited).

There is no better way to lose good employees than to tolerate and condone bad ones. They need to trim the fat. We need better people at all levels. And they need to equitably distribute work and get rid of freeloaders and reward high achievers.

Coverage for vacation

- Central staffing.
- Bigger investment in legal staff.
- More clarity on partnership, more perks
- More structure.
- Actually giving work to juniors
- having a central assignment system
- Technological upgrades (both hardware and software)
- Remove the salary holdback for associates

Cultivate a better culture to retain associates and mitigate against attrition; respect associates' time off/leave and do not retaliate against them for taking such time away.

Be more honest about it's expectations of it's employees and be honest about what they want and expect in terms of time commitment rather than present a care for personal wellbeing or commitments outside of work and then penalize people for that.

- Billable Hours
- Business
- Diversity
- Lifestyle
- Training

Providing more structure around meeting others, via Zoom meetings or otherwise, when joining so as to feel more comfortable communicating when mostly remote

More **meaningful commitment** to pro bono, better professional development programs given earlier

Health insurance is far too expensive; more predictable hours; better management skills for mid-level and senior associates.

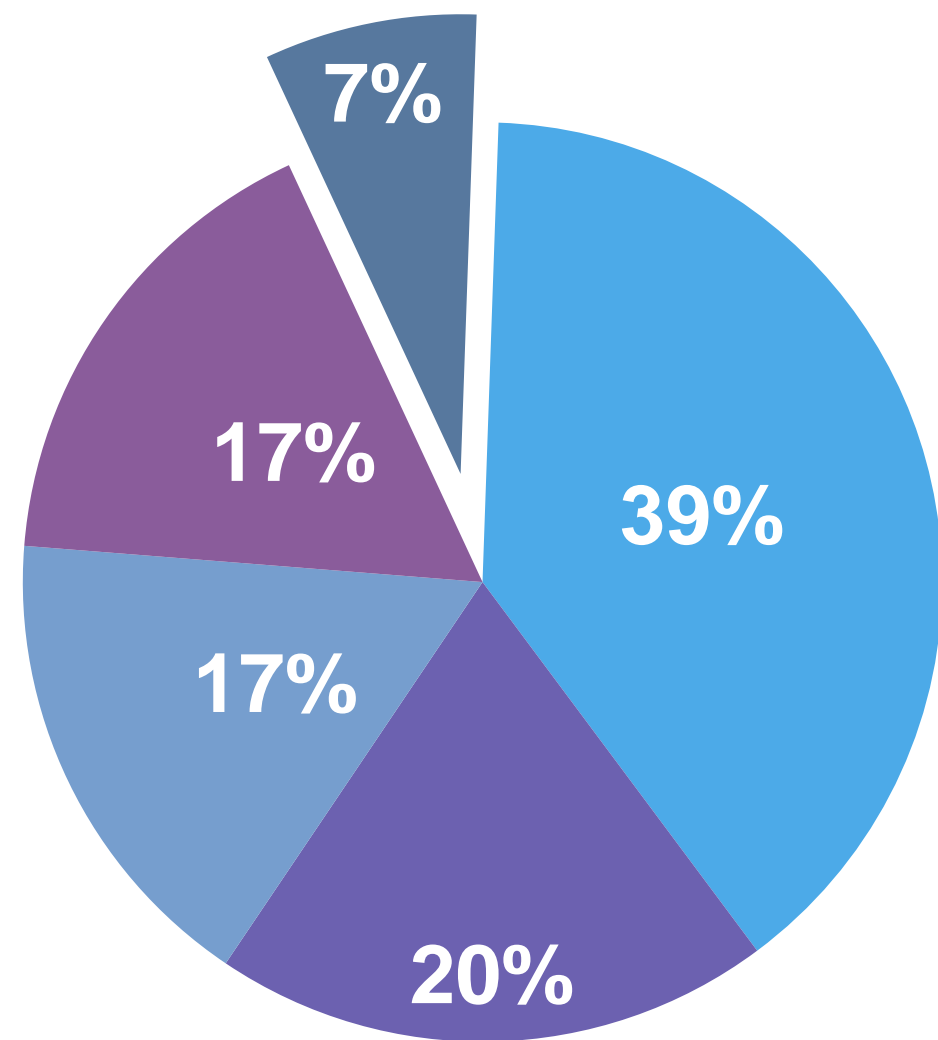
Support associates treating pro bono obligations as equal to billable obligations, even though a smaller share of total time

More work-life balance, not rewarding overcompetitive behavior (i.e. sabotaging fellow associates to better your own career); making after-hour billable rates higher than business hour billables; more focus on professional development/investment in junior associates



What change(s) could your firm make that would be the most meaningful to you?

Improvement Suggestion Topics



- Billable Hours
- Diversity
- Training
- Business
- Lifestyle

Transparency, actual inclusion for people of different backgrounds **flexible** remote work; flexible reduced FTE that don't require baring your soul and personal information just to be even considered; and actually promoting and including associates and partners of diverse backgrounds and experience instead of stigmatizing them and instead of just hosting D&I marketing events that attorneys are discouraged to attend because they're not billable or otherwise creditable); stop economically and emotionally punishing associates for not having work-- when its partners' responsibility to bring in business to ensure associates actually have work; match market pay and incentivize mid-level and senior associates to stay so that juniors can actually form meaningful relationships with them, be trained by them, and build mentorship relationships with them

more **flexibility** Care more about associates and work life balance **Remote work.**

When we were summers, we were told how **flexible** working from home would be, but since we have started it seems there is a lot of judgment if the work from home option is taken. Although I think the culture here is better than elsewhere, there is still an element of being told you need to just sit at your desk and twiddle your thumbs from 9-5, even if you are not given any work. I feel that that is disrespectful of everyone's time and unrealistic in a world where many older associates and partners are not coming in everyday.

Allow for fully unplugged time without setting the expectation/requirement that you constantly be accessible.

Mental health check-ins (that actually had meaningful impact); time off

More **mental health** resources and training

Fully **remote work** for employees who live beyond a certain distance from the office.





Thank You